NEW FICTION —IN— VARIED FORMS

ROUGH-HEWN. By Dorothy Canfield. Harcourt, Brace & Co.

TO the professional reader of fiction there comes at infrequent intervals a book that is not merely a brave human story but an intellectual banquet full of the complex richness of life seen from a multitude of angles and interpreted with the wisdom of experience and the colorful tones of Old World culture. To this rare category must unquestionably be added Dorothy Canfield's latest volume, "Rough-Hewn," in which are blended the tragedies of adolescence, the true and false values of modern education, the perplexing paradoxes of racial standards and viewpoints and the eternal quest of youth for the goal of happiness.

Like most really big books, "Rough-Hewn" is almost primitive in its simplicity of structure. It takes up minutely, in alternate sections, the life stories of a boy and a girl, quite unknown to each other and seemingly placed by an obscure whim of fate about as far apart, by birth, environment and early training, as two young Americans of the well to do social class possibly could be. Neale Crittenden, whom we first meet at the age of ten, glorying in the possession of a brand new shinny stick, lives in a modest home on the outskirts of Hoboken, where his unambitious father earns a comfortable livelihood from a lumber business. We get an enviable picture of a contented fireside, of a "free flowing tide of trust and affection" between the father and mother, who, loving their little son deeply, are none the less puzzled by him because he is such an "awfully *quiet* kid—you haven't any idea whether he's having a real boy's fun or not." But they have the rare understanding to let the boy alone, to respect his reticences. Always in after life Neale remembers gratefully, "Father and mother always let me alone—let me grow."

If this book had merely been the annals of the growth of one American boy and of how he wrestled one by one with his individual problems and conquered them it would still have been a notable achievement. Studies of boy life, of school and college days, have rarely been done with more sympathetic insight. Especially remarkable are the chapters given to the four crucial years in Columbia, where his ambitions center upon the university football team and where at first he finds himself a failure, is put out of the game and "sits on the sidelines eating his heart out" until he learns his first big lesson in life, namely, that it is often only by being temporarily out of the active game of life that one gets the right perspective and comes to understand "the real inwardness of what it is all about." Having grasped the real inwardness, Neale goes back into the game and presently finds himself captain of the team.

Meanwhile, at Bayonne, in the south of France, Marise Allen, only child of her expatriated father and mother, is growing up chiefly in the care of the old Basque cook and housekeeper, Jeanne Amigorena, who diligently trains her in the fine art of deception and falsehood. Her pretty, self-centered mother is too indolent, too busy with her French novels, her futile dabbling in culture, to give the child any serious attention, while the father, equally weak and selfish in his way, lets things drift and only once in recorded history gives Marise a bit of wholesome advice:

"Look here, Molly, there is something in the air here, by heck, and I wish you'd get it. I mean the way every one of them in this country keeps right after what he's doing till he's got it just right. That's the way to do, and we're all off the track with our 'That'll do,' the way we say back in America. It's the only thing in this whole darned country I can see that don't make you sick."

Marise takes her father's advice very seriously. Consequently she absorbs with extraordinary thoroughness all her lessons in French orthography and history, deportment and music, Gothic architecture and subtle deceit. Growing up in the unwholesome atmosphere of servants' gossip she develops a precocious knowledge all the more harmful because it is repressed; "there was nobody she could tell; there was nowhere to run for help." When she is fifteen a terrible thing happens. Her pretty, selfish mother sometimes went to Saint Sauveur for the sulphur baths. One morning she returns unnerved, hysterical, prostrated by the tragedy of a young man, a mere boy, who drowned himself before her eyes. Whether this boy, brother of one of Marise's school friends, had actually been staying at the same Saint Sauveur Hotel with Marise's mother, and whether the latter had really blamed herself for his death and tried to plunge into the river after him are matters that we never quite know. The devoted old Basque woman, Jeanne, lies valiently to the police and saves a public scandal. But Marise hears it all, and locking up her knowledge deep within her faces the world with premature cynicism and disillusion.

Such are the two protagonists of this many sided story. But before that "Destiny, which shapes our ends," decides to bring them together, they both must still live a number of years, make a number of blunders and stumble along blindly—because it is only by the slow attrition of time that the rough hewn ends of even the best of human timber can be shaped to worthy purpose. To analyse further the concrete happenings of Dorothy Canfield's story would be rendering it a doubtful service. The magic spell of its deep understanding and contagious sympathy cannot be given at second hand. It is only directly from the pages themselves that you get in varying degrees the vivid and compelling personalities not merely of Neale and Marise but of a score of other men and women whose joys and griefs touch us more intimataely than those of many a flesh and blood acquaintance outside of book land. And the inherent bigness of the book is further attested by the fact that after you have finished the story and satisfied yourself that the marriage of Neale and Marise is one of those rare and predestined unions that promise abiding happiness you can still go back to the book again and again and discover in it new and unguessed meanings, subtle questions and discreet answers. Only very rarely does one meet with such an all around and deeply satisfying novel.

FREDERIC TABER COOPER.

GIGOLO. A collection of short stories. By Edna Ferber. Doubleday, Page & Co.

WHEN Edna Ferber's first novel, "Dawn O'Hara," was published she was 23 years old. Had she managed to postpone her arrival at that age until this later day she would have been put up for membership in The Younger Generation. She would have lunched around a good deal and been photographed laughingly in rompers and lectured in department stores beside a neat Campanile of "Dawn O'Haras." Then she would have devoted the immediately succeeding years to a number of bright papers on the following topics: Dear Old Mrs. Wharton, The Sudden Thirties, The Avidity of Adolescence, and Keats, Chatterton and Myself.

Edna Ferber.

As there were no such pleasant avocations in those days for budding authors enjoying the first fine thrill of discovering themselves literate, there was nothing for her to do but write more stories. They came in abundance—the tales of Emma McChesney, mostly—alive, shrewd, warm-hearted, quizzical, full of bounce, and electrical with the thing we call the dramatic. Then, at last, she strangled Emma with her own hands and went to work harder than ever.

Since then there has been great growth. There was more of wisdom and art and truth in "The Girls" than in any of the work that had preceded that admirable novel. There is as much in the best of "Gigolo," the new bundle of eight short stories now fresh from the presses.

It is customary, we believe, for reviewers of Miss Ferber's pieces either to couple her name with Fannie Hurst's (a purely phonetic association that amounts to an impertinence) or to go to the other extreme and say that on her shoulders has fallen the mantle of O. Henry—a painful expression, suggestive, somehow, of a bruising catastrophe in the O. Henry back parlor. We can think of only half a dozen tales in the entire O. Henry shelf that deserve to be mentioned in the same breath with the better half of these which make up "Gigolo." And if any one else, here or in England since Kipling grew weary, is writing short stories which surpass them in their humanity or in their craftsmanship they do not appear in the magazines to which our barber subscribes.

The present collection is not all of a piece. It swings between so entertaining but obviously pumped up a project as "Ain't Nature Wonderful?" to so inevitable and perfect a story as "Old Man Minnick"; between so crisp and expert a job as "Not a Day Over Twenty One" to so lofty and understanding a story as "The Sudden Sixties."

One element in her work which seems most profoundly to impress her publishers—judging from the gasps of their astonishment tucked into the pockets of the jacket—is her familiar capacity to dramatize and enhance the commonplace. This is, to be sure, a gift of hers. But it is a gift which she shares with many writers. The gift she does not share is her capacity to speak volumes in a few pages. It is not that she compresses an anecdote to the pemmican dimensions of a paragraph. It is not that she crams a short story into the space of a parable. But, with her amazing economy of means, she does expend a whole novel in five thousand words. In "The Sudden Sixties," for instance, there is such a vista of the years, such a perspective of the generations, such a rise and fall of a family, a community, an ethic, as you will find in few latter day novels. From the day Hannah Winter packs up her wine colored wedding dress and moves to Indianapolis to the day when she sits, glum and thwarted and mutinous, in a Chicago dental parlor, waiting while the brace is adjusted to her granddaughter's teeth—what a time o' years! as Grandma used to say in the immortal "Bunker Bean." Yet there it all is in thirty-six teeming pages—a stroke here, a stroke there, saying incredibly much in incredibly little, as Forain does in a drawing.

Perhaps this feat is not of the essence of fine art, as the professors would imply. Sometimes we wonder if our artists do not become too absorbed in this game, as an end in itself—fascinated by their score in strokes, like literary golf players. But such a doubt could assail no one in reading the best tales in "Gigolo," so brilliant and complete is their expression, so real their people that one becomes hopelessly involved in their concerns, so infectiously full of that interest in, and zest for, life which Mr. Dickens had—which Mr. Tarkington has. Really the publishers might ape the magazine covers and emblazon on the jacket of "Gigolo" this inscription: "Six Full Novels—Complete in This Issue."

ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT.

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